

FireFighter

The magazine of the Fire Brigades Union www.fbu.org.uk

September 2006

Regional Controls

MPs give their verdict

WIN

A TOP QUALITY
PHOTO PRINTER

see p22



Attacks on firefighters

Parliament gives its final blessing
to Emergency Workers Bill

Merseyside to say Yes ...

Ballot reflects anger
over cuts

... meanwhile in Kendal

Members ramp up campaigning
over night time cover threat

More local fights on the way



As I write, Merseyside members are balloting for industrial action. This is the latest in what is an ever growing list of local disputes following the 2003 pay and conditions agreement. It is unfortunate that certain chief officers and fire service politicians seem hell-bent on confrontation. This approach does nobody any good. Our members and officials in Merseyside and elsewhere would rather talk and reach negotiated settlements to the issues under dispute. Unfortunately, it often appears that the only way to make our employers listen is to ballot for action – and, if necessary, to take that action.

I am sure that our members in Merseyside will respond to the call of their brigade committee and send a very clear message to the chief officer and to the fire and rescue authority. At the same time, I am sure that FBU members across the UK will respond as we always do – with full support in terms of finance, messages of solidarity and physical support when necessary.

Regional controls – time for a government re-think

The House of Commons Select Committee has published its report into the fire and rescue service. We have published key findings on our e-bulletin and in a special bulletin to branches. Further information is included in this magazine. One thing that stands out from the report is that concern over regionalisation is widespread – across the service.

The FBU may have shouted the loudest on this issue but many others are also concerned. They are concerned about the possibility (indeed the probability) of escalating cost and they are concerned about whether the whole project will work at all.

We do not yet have the formal response of the government to this inquiry report but worrying noises suggest that the conclusion may well be to: “Carry on regardless.”

My message to Ministers is that such an approach would send a terrible message to those who work in the fire and rescue service – especially those who work in emergency fire controls.

Many of us are already concerned that ‘consultation’ processes are often a sham and that the conclusions are reached before the consultation even starts. For the government to effectively ignore the concerns reflected across the service and the doubts expressed by the Select Committee would be disastrous. I also take this opportunity to urge others within the fire and rescue service to speak out on this crucial issue. We are well aware that many share our concerns – it is time to make those views clear to government before any further steps are taken down this dangerous road.

Deaths of firefighters in Hungary

I have just found out about the deaths of three firefighters in a fire at the University of Budapest in Hungary. Seven others were taken to hospital. I have sent condolences to our colleagues in the firefighters union in Hungary and I am sure that we all share



Budapest firefighters tackle a railway station blaze

the sense of grief when such a tragedy strikes – wherever in the world it happens.

This demonstrates very clearly why we maintain links with our colleagues in other countries. We face the same dangers and often the same political and industrial challenges. There is clearly a bond that unites us as professionals doing the same job, wherever we do it. The team work and sense of camaraderie which we have all experienced within the fire service is the same across the

globe and that is why there is a shared sense of sadness when one of our own dies – wherever that may be.

Indeed firefighters in many parts of the world (even in many parts of Europe) often face even tougher challenges in terms of wages, working conditions and health and safety. A part of our job is to ensure that we learn from each other and that our brothers and sisters elsewhere can benefit from the experiences we have been through. We can clearly also learn from them.



That can only be to the benefit of all.

Dan Riddell

Finally I would like on behalf of the Union to pay my respects to former national official Dan Riddell, who passed away in June. His dedication to serving FBU members and to the advancement of equality in the fire service, as well as his activism in the wider labour and progressive movement, is an inspiration to us all.

Matt Wrack

YOUR LETTERS

RDS firefighters don't cover wholetime shifts

FIFTH COLUMN on Strathclyde (July/August 2006) not only attacks an individual but also contains false claims. Yes, the overtime budget may be running over at a water rescue station, but on no occasions have firefighters working the retained system covered whole time shifts, let alone between shifts with their main employer as crane drivers or HGV drivers.

John Cairns, brigade chair, Strathclyde

On behalf of Strathclyde Brigade Committee

EDITOR'S COMMENT: We can confirm that the article contained the above mentioned inaccuracies.

→ *Firefighter* welcomes your letters relating to articles published in the magazine. We do not publish letters where an email address only is supplied. Please include full postal address and/or membership number. We may edit letters.

Letters should be sent to FBU Head Office: Bradley House, 68 Coombe Road, Kingston upon Thames KT2 7AE or firefighter@fbu.org.uk

Firefighter wins accolades

Firefighter received accolades in this year's TUC press and public relations awards, coming second in the entries for best publication. *Firefighter* was "highly commended" for "a strong campaigning tone and excellent features". The judges felt it "does its job really well" with "union-related activity to the fore" and "a good mix of local and national news". Referring to a Day Off feature on mountaineering, the judges also said that it is "not afraid to break the mould".



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A veteran of stage and screen at just 22

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MPs from all parties are not convinced by the government's plans for regional controls

PUZZLES

WIN
A top quality photo printer see p22

Take part in our prize quiz and win an Epson Stylus Photo R340. This printer gives you the power to print glossy, borderless photos, with or without using a computer. You can print them directly from a digital camera or cameraphone. You can edit your photos and preview them with the 2.4" colour monitor before printing. The innovative PhotoEnhance feature ensures you get optimal results every time you print. You can print photos and designs onto compatible CDs and DVDs from a memory card or your computer.



Published by the Fire Brigades Union, Bradley House, 68 Coombe Road, Kingston Upon Thames, KT2 7AE.
www.fbu.org.uk
Tel: 020 8541 1765. Fax: 020 8546 5187
Design by Edition Periodicals 241-251 Ferndale Road London SW9 8BJ. www.edition.co.uk.
Printed by Southernprint Ltd, 17-21 Factory Road, Upton Industrial Estate, Poole, Dorset BH 16 5SN.





PICTURES: ANDREW WARD



Merseyside firefighters used humour to make their point in a major dispute five years ago. They were backed by colleagues from all over the country who demonstrated in Liverpool (above) against plans by the authority to employ non-uniformed operational managers

Fire crews set for action over plan to cut 120 posts

MERSEYSIDE BALLOT

Merseyside fire crews were expecting a 'yes' vote in their strike ballot which was set to close on Monday 21 August.

Local fire crews have been balloting over plans to cut 120 emergency response firefighter posts – one in ten of the workforce – 15 emergency fire control operator posts and axe four fire engines at night time. There will be fewer rescue appliances, fewer firefighters on fire engines and a longer wait for crews to arrive to all 999 emergencies.

The loss of one in ten fulltime firefighter

posts – in addition to the 68 posts lost last year – will inevitably damage the overall operational capability of the Merseyside fire and rescue service. Fire crews say this will clearly compromise their safety and the safety of the public.

Les Skarratts, Merseyside FBU secretary said: "The loss of one in ten full time posts – on top of the 68 lost last year – will impact on our safety and the safety of the public. There would be fewer frontline firefighters taking longer to get to emergencies with less rescue equipment available.

"Fire crews could be left at incidents either standing back and doing nothing until more support arrives and risking the

public, or ignoring basic safety procedures and risking themselves. Merseyside fire crews do not want to take industrial action but we do expect a 'yes' vote because of the savage cuts we are faced with.

"The public consultation is a charade because the chief officer says he has already implemented the job losses. Senior managers are confident they can scare councillors into backing these panic measures but they will not frighten us into giving in to them.

"We are prepared to have talks at any time. If councillors and senior managers want to have genuine negotiations then this needs to happen as a matter of urgency."

Union wants action over stretched crews

CLIMATE CHANGE

The Government is ignoring the growing pressures placed on fire and rescue services by climate change, says the FBU. The Union has called for an immediate end to cuts in personnel and for an immediate cash injection of £60 million to be distributed fairly between fire authorities in recognition of the additional pressures and substantial cost increases they are now facing.

FBU General Secretary Matt Wrack said: "The dry and warm weather has created the perfect conditions for the huge increase in the number of major fires so far this summer. As soon as we've stopped tackling the fires we've been hit almost immediately with torrential rain causing flash flooding."

"These incidents often need hundreds of fire crews working for many days to control fires and deal with the other extreme weather."

"Fire crews have been working up to 14 hours without a break which is well beyond accepted safe limits. The result has been heat exhaustion and dehydration, with firefighters working to the point of collapse."

"The strain on officers has been severe and emergency fire control operators have

also handled thousands of extra calls and been placed under major pressure. In some areas the fire service has been stretched so much in dealing with these incidents there are almost no crews or fire engines to deal with other emergencies.

"In three out of the last four years we have faced huge numbers of incidents caused by changing weather patterns."

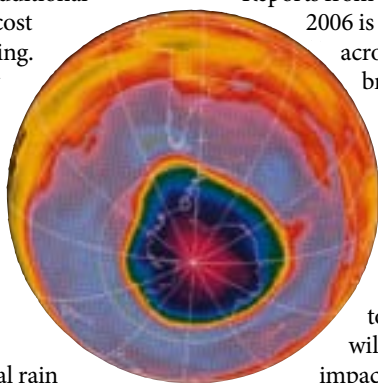
Reports from across the UK suggest that 2006 is even worse with fire crews across the UK stretched to breaking point.

"Those at the sharp end firmly believe the UK weather is already more extreme, varied and unpredictable."

"In prevention terms, steps taken now to tackle global warming will take decades to have any impact. The Government must shake off its complacency and call an immediate halt to all plans to cut the number of fire crews until the huge impact

climate change is having on the service has been properly assessed."

"The Government should immediately free up around £60 million to be distributed fairly between fire authorities to assist. This would help with the additional pressures and substantial extra costs faced by local fire authorities as a result of dealing with the effects of climate change."



Satellite map showing "hole" in the ozone layer over Antarctica

Brother Dan Riddell

OBITUARY

The funeral of Brother Dan Riddell, former National Officer of the Fire Brigades Union, took place on 22 June 2006. He passed away on 11 June following a long illness.

Dan joined the fire service in London in 1957 and within a year became a Branch Secretary and two years later District Secretary (Regional Sec). He transferred to Kent in 1963 and within a short time became

Brigade Secretary and was elected Executive Council member for Region 12 in 1967. Dan was elected National Officer in 1975, a position he held until his retirement in 1990.

His references as National Officer were legal and pensions and his 15 years in dealing with these issues saw major advances for firefighters and their dependants, with new laws created and record damages for members. Dan was also involved with the introduc-

tion of equal opportunities into the union and the fire service. In addition to his work within the union, Dan was involved with the Labour Party, Amnesty International, Anti Nazi League, World Disarmament Campaign and the World Peace Council.

A quietly spoken man, with a dry sense of humour, Dan was widely respected at all levels of the fire service and within the FBU. He will be widely missed.

Sounding off!

TIM MARSHALL

Vicar of Bovingdon

Herts County Council – you have robbed us

THE PEOPLE of Bovingdon and of Radlett have been robbed by Herts County Council. Something historic, vital for our well-being, essential to our community life has been taken from us. Our retained fire stations are to be closed under a new plan created by the Chief Fire Officer and proposed to the County Council by Councillor David Lloyd.

In the village of Bovingdon generations have served their community, and the wider community, by their work as retained fire officers. They have saved lives, rescued victims and prevented death and destruction in homes, factories, at Buncefield and at road traffic accidents thousands of times. Yet these fire and rescue services have now been taken from us by a vote in County Hall which introduced a new safety plan.

Thanks to the courage of the FBU who were prepared to take industrial action, a fair amount of change has been made to the

It appears that the issue is not cost, but ideology.

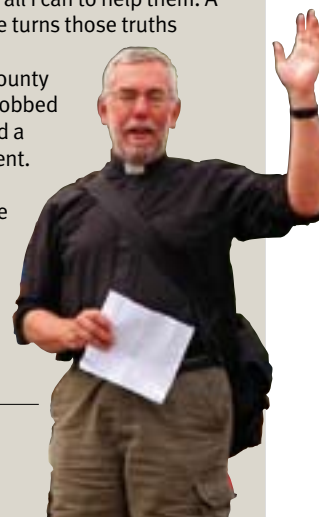
plan and some of the calamities it would have brought upon the people of Hertfordshire have been averted. But for reasons which remain unclear, the retained fire stations at Bovingdon and Radlett are to be closed. It appears that the issue is not cost, but ideology.

As a result of a decision by Herts County Council, taken against the expressed wishes of thousands and thousands of residents in Hertfordshire, all our lives are less safe today than they were a few months ago.

I am a Christian minister. The God I believe in teaches me to "love my neighbour as myself". The God I believe in teaches that "it is more blessed to give than to receive". The God I believe in teaches that if I see someone in need I should do all I can to help them. A retained fire service turns those truths into actions.

Hertfordshire County Council, you have robbed us. You have proved a great disappointment. Bovingdon and Radlett retained fire services, you have given us pride. You have made us rich. In you we have never been disappointed.

→ Extracts from a sermon given by Tim Marshall, Vicar of Bovingdon



Battle for Radlett continues

HERTFORDSHIRE DISPUTE

Herts fire crews have ended industrial action over cuts and closures to the County's fire service following a deal struck with the county council which will see the reversal of many of the cuts but the battle to keep Radlett fire station open continues.

The deal includes a new written assurance of no more cuts to frontline fire crews, frontline fire appliances or fire station closures for at least three years. A new recruitment drive to employ 39 new firefighters is now underway to redress frontline staffing shortfalls across the county.

The existing 999 response cover at both Watford and Royston will be maintained and cuts at those stations will not now go ahead. Four frontline posts at Hemel Hempstead, Watford and St Albans, 12 in total, will be redeployed to focus on preventative work while



remaining available to crew fire engines when necessary.

However, Bovingdon was closed on 31 July and Radlett, after much pressure, has been given only a temporary reprieve to enable more time to find the cash to keep it open.

The Union and local community continue to mobilise for its survival.

The FBU and local residents are particularly angry because it has emerged that the fire authority failed to hit its own 999 response times to incidents

at Radlett and Bovingdon in the four weeks that fire engines were removed during the dispute. These disastrous facts, uncovered after local fire crews analysed the response times, fly in the face of assurances by politicians that the Radlett and Bovingdon areas would be easily covered by other fire stations.

"If councillors press ahead with these closures they will be playing Russian roulette with firefighter and public safety," said FBU Herts vice-chair Tony Smith.

◆ Fire crews across Cleveland were meeting to discuss proposals from the fire authority on changes to the local service as *Firefighter* went to press. Representatives from fire stations in Cleveland met on 28 July and agreed to recommend acceptance of the new proposals, which will see fewer cuts to emergency response than originally planned. The proposals followed negotiations between management and the Union. Cleveland FBU members voted 3:1 in favour of strike action over the fire authority's cuts package earlier in July.

◆ The FBU hosted a meeting of unions representing firefighters from 12 countries in Europe in Kingston in July. It debated pensions and working time among other common issues. The meeting, jointly organised and financed by the Brussels-based European Federation of Public Services Unions (EPSU), also discussed how to influence European policymaking on fire and heard how chief fire officers are working closely together at a European level. A European firefighters' "charter" outlining common policy positions and objectives is now to be drafted.

◆ FBU Assistant General Secretary Andy Dark joined representatives from trade unions organising firefighters in the USA, New Zealand, Australia, Canada in Hawaii in July. Having discovered common problems such as inadequate conditions of service and levels of pay, the representatives agreed to create an 'international network of communication' and unite to achieve common goals and objectives.

◆ The National Joint Council (NJC) agreed to delay the phasing out of long service increment (LSI) following news that its replacement, continual professional development (CPD), was not to be introduced as originally planned on July 1. Delays in the negotiations over CPD meant that the scheme was not able to be implemented on time. The FBU argued that LSI should remain in place at the current figure of £990 while talks on CPD continued. The payment of LSI at full-rate has now been extended to September 30 while negotiations over CPD continue.

Deaths caused by LFB's basic failures

BETHNAL GREEN INQUEST

The inquest into the deaths of two London FBU members while attending a shop fire in Bethnal Green, east London, in July 2004 has concluded that Bill Faust and Adam Meere died due to basic failures by London Fire Brigade (LFB), including failure to provide BA communications, failure to provide adequate water and ventilating the building while they were inside fighting fire in the basement.

The inquest heard a hose reel was burnt through and more powerful water jets were not used despite the nature of the fire and the strength of the flames. The inquest heard 30 minutes passed between the order being given to use a fire hydrant and the water being used.

It also heard that the two firefighters were still in the basement when colleagues opened doors and windows to ventilate the building, which may have caused the fire to spread, killing the men.

The jury found there had been a failure to recognise the potential effect of ventilating the building in helping to escalate the fire. Coroner Andrew Reid said he would be writing to the relevant authorities urging that the accident investigators' recommendations were followed up, to prevent more deaths.



Adam Meere



Bill Faust

The FBU, which represented the families of Bill and Adam at the inquest, argued that systematic failings in communications, training, command and control contributed to the deaths of the two firefighters. It welcomed the coroners narrative verdict which endorsed this view but said LFB's denial of responsibility was "disappointing".

Gerard Stilliard of FBU solicitors Thompsons said: "The failures of the Brigade on the day that Billy and Adam died are shocking. We now know without a shadow of a doubt that the Brigade's negligence caused their deaths."

The Faust family welcomed the ruling and called for current practices to be tightened.

Mr Meere's father Pat, a former firefighter, called for the brigade to admit that "mistakes made" and commit itself to put those mistakes right for the future.

North Yorkshire's rural tranquillity has been rudely broken

GEOFF CRAWFORD/REPORT DIGITAL



FIFTH COLUMN

An anonymous take on events in a brigade near you

The rural tranquillity County of North Yorkshire has been rudely broken to the sounds of 'modernisation' in the fire service. The loud methodical din of the wholesale demolition of our fire cover standards is ringing in our ears.

The modernisation fever that is sweeping the fire service nationally is being replaced in North Yorkshire by a more virulent strain - the necessity to tick as many 'tick boxes' as possible to satisfy the Auditors who come into town from time to time.

The Brigade Committee along with our members have responded positively and tremendously to this new challenge with renewed vigour.

Local officials have been trying to tackle a management team who routinely turn a blind eye to TB 1/1997, riding with three on a pump and riding with no supervisory manager to incidents. Management have written policies to try and convince our members that this practice is acceptable and safe. These policies have not even been discussed with the local FBU, let alone agreed to. Policies that even the Brigade management hypocritically fail to adhere to themselves.

Our local officials, along with our EC Member Bob Blackburn, have tried to engage with senior management to prevent these practices but has been told that these breaches of crew safety only occur 'on a handful of occasions'.

The CFO's desk must be piled high with letters of dispute from the FBU. We now have a situation where personal and corporate grievances are spiralling out of control.

The Union has campaigned tirelessly to involve local media to bring this to a head with some success. We've also been pursuing alternative avenues such as using the Health & Safety Executive, to get our message

NORTH YORKSHIRE

Modernisation or 'Tick Box' Heaven?

across. Only last week a pump with three riders and no supervisory manager was mobilised to a fire at a hotel and a BA Team was committed. This incident required the evacuation of the public, six pumps and the closing of the hotel with costs estimated to reach over £200,000. This crew of three was put in an impossible position by so-called 'standard operating procedures'.

Another facet of North Yorkshire 'modernisation' is to introduce a policy of non-attendance to 'low risk premises' that may be protected by AFA systems unless confirmed by a back-up call.


There is also a drive to introduce a 12-hour shift system with a reduced stand down. This is necessary, say managers, to cope with the increased work load; despite the reduction of 30 front line firefighters, the very people who are affected by the proposed duty system. An FBU survey yielded a 98% support against these proposed changes.

Day crewed staff have shown, through a local FBU survey, that they also oppose the views of management on a wide range of issues surrounding their Conditions of Service.

Management have tried to change Conditions of Service by sending out new contracts to selective people with an inference that unless the contracts are signed the employee will not receive the right money for the job. Dickensian 'modernisation' in all its glory!

Union officials at all levels in the region have striven ceaselessly to halt these bully-boy tactics from management both industrially and legally. We have averted two '90-day notices' to impose the 12-hour duty system and involved the NJC Joint Secretaries in the dispute, with a visit to RAP planned in the near future.

Who said 'modernisation' was supposed to address problems, not create them?



Firefighters tackle a major factory fire.
Whether the RRO maintains high fire safety
levels depends on fire authority enforcement

PICTURE: SHOUT/REPORTDIGITAL.CO.UK

Regulatory Reform Order

GLYN EVANS, FBU FIRE SAFETY ADVISOR

“ AFTER much delay, on 1 October 2006, the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 will finally come into force in England and Wales. The Regulatory Reform Act, which sponsors the Order, does not apply in Scotland and Northern Ireland, but their administrations have chosen similar legal devices to introduce the principles of the Order to ensure a common approach to fire safety across the UK.

The RRO, as it is commonly referred to, is the final manifestation of a Fire Safety Bill promoted by the FBU since 1992. The aim of the Bill and then the Order was to rationalise and condense the existing rambling mass of over 100 statutes and statutory instruments that contain fire safety requirements in the UK into one piece of legislation. Like general health and safety legislation, it would be based upon the

principles of risk assessment, risk reduction and risk management. Underpinning this approach is the principle that the risk maker (primarily an employer) is responsible for assessing the risks that they create within their workplace and ensuring that those risks are removed wherever possible. Where risks cannot be entirely removed, they must be reduced to acceptable levels and adequate protective and preventative measures provided to deal with any residual risk that remains.

The move to risk assessment from the process of fire certification that underpinned the Fire Precautions Act 1971 was necessary to meet the obligations placed upon the UK by the EC Framework and Workplace Directives. It heralds something of a cultural change for fire and rescue service enforcers. Previously, under the 1971 Act, the fire authority's enforcers would determine

both the level of risk and the measures necessary to ensure the safety of the occupants of a building in case of fire. These principles were encapsulated within the Fire Precautions (Workplace) Regulations 1997, which were developed by the previous administration and unfortunately have never achieved much success with either the business community or fire and rescue authorities. Under the RRO the tasks of assessment and fire safety provision must now be undertaken by the 'responsible person' and the duty placed upon the fire and rescue authority by parliament is to ensure that the responsible person complies with those duties properly and successfully.

The fire certification process of the 1971 Act has, however, been very successful. It found wide approval within the business community because fire certificates generated a sense of well being and

safety compliance – even though in some cases once issued they were ignored by their owners. There was also a high degree of confidence in the safety effects of fire certificates by the general public. Nevertheless, all existing fire certificates issued under the 1971 Act in England and Wales will cease to have effect when the RRO comes into force next month. Businesses that hold fire certificates for their workplaces, however, would be well advised to keep hold of them and use them as a basis for their future risk assessments under the RRO.

With the removal of fire certification the key to ensuring both public confidence in the proposed fire safety risk assessment system and the ongoing safety from fire of the public and business is the proper enforcement of the Order by the fire and rescue authorities. Fire and rescue authorities must ensure through their enforcement activities that

the statutory fire safety duties are being discharged properly by those upon whom they fall. Given that those duties now include the safety of firefighters through the maintenance of any equipment and facilities provided for their use there is a double incentive for fire and rescue authorities to ensure enforcement is both thorough and targeted at high risk premises.

This requirement for a public confidence factor was noted in the Eleventh Report of Session 2003-4 – Proposal for the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2004 published by the House of Commons Regulatory Reform Committee. The Committee recommended that article 26 of the draft Order be amended obliging the Secretary of State to issue guidance to fire authorities on their enforcement of the provisions of the Order and monitor the enforcement activity of fire authorities.

The committee also recommended that the Secretary of State be given powers to issue directions to fire authorities on their enforcement activities.

The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) – now the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) – complied with these recommendations.

Whether the Order is successful and maintains the high fire safety levels generated by the 1971 Act will depend entirely on how well it is used and enforced by the fire and rescue authorities in England and Wales. The public will not spare them or the Government if we slide back into an era of large multi fatality fires in non-domestic premises that blighted the last four decades of the twentieth century. So from here on in the approach might be different. But the end game has to be the same – safety from fire. ”

MPs PASS EMERGENCY WORKERS BILL

The Bill is set to become law this autumn after MPs passed the draft legislation before the summer recess.

MPs gave the final ok to the Emergency Workers (Obstruction) Bill after its third reading in the House of Commons in July in what constitutes a major step forward in the Union's campaign against attacks on firefighters. The Private Member's Bill seeks to make it a specific offence to obstruct or hinder emergency workers such as firefighters. Tabled by Alan Williams, Labour MP for Swansea West, and backed by the FBU, it will now go to the Lords and should become law in the autumn. Alan Williams' Private Member's Bill – a rare example of this type of bill that has been successful – enjoys cross party backing.

The success of the Bill marks a key milestone in the Union's campaign – launched in April 2005 – to tackle the growing problem of attacks on firefighters. The FBU and its parliamentary support group worked closely with Mr Williams in building support for the Bill.

There are 40 attacks on UK fire crews every week and the problem is getting worse, according to research carried out last for the FBU by the Labour Research Department. In some parts of the country, fire crews are served a daily diet of bricks, bottles and missiles as they fight fires; in parts of the country ambushes have been set for firefighters. The attacks include: scaffolding poles being thrown through windscreens of fire engines; crews being attacked with concrete blocks, bricks and bottles; being shot at; spat at; equipment tampered with or stolen; direct physical assaults on fire crews; and equipment being urinated on. And under-reporting of attacks means that the figure could be as much as three

times higher. Official statistics show that attacks are now running at about 2,000 a year, but the FBU and the brigades contacted during the research acknowledge that there is a serious problem of under-reporting.

Opening the debate during the third reading of the Bill in the House of Commons on July 14, MP Alan Williams said: "The Bill addresses the offence of impeding emergency workers. It is based on two straightforward, simple principles. First, people who risk their lives to save others should not be obstructed, and should be free to undertake their rescue work without obstruction and attack by jobs and idiots. Secondly, people who need to be rescued in an emergency because they are in danger should not face additional danger because of the mindless activity of a minority of idiots."

Lyn Brown, Labour MP for West Ham, added: "The Bill puts in statute a respect for emergency services and emergency service workers that may not hitherto have been established. I believe that it will incrementally change opinion and the perception of those workers."

FBU policies to the fore

The Bill may underline the importance of data collection on attacks since it provides an indication to firefighters something may be done about it, Ms Brown added. Citing FBU policies on attacks on firefighter, she said:

"The [Fire Brigades] union also wants co-ordination and evaluation. I understand that various initiatives are being introduced throughout the country, including community-based projects with offenders and possible offenders. I know that we would all agree that there is a need for such initiatives to be properly monitored and evaluated nation-

**Firefighters
attacked by
horse racers**

**Razor blades wedged
syringes taped to the
in the yobs' sick war**

ally so that brigades can learn more quickly what works and what does not. Frankly, what works in one area will not necessarily work in another."

She added that she understood arrangements for reporting attacks had been "tightened and improved" so data should henceforth "reflect better the situation as a whole". MPs also called for a national education programme and a range of other measures that tackle anti-social behaviour at its root.

Speaking on behalf of the Government the Minister for Policing, Security and Community Safety, Tony McNulty said that "impeding, obstructing or doing something worse to prevent our emergency workers from going about their business... [is] simply not right in any way, shape or form. Whether it is just a kick-out at authority, or whatever the excuse is, or not, it must desist, and we must introduce legislation that addresses the issues—and the Bill is a necessary part of that."

He added that there was a need to "go a long way back along the chain and consider issues such as parenting, family breakdown and other factors that are the antecedents of antisocial behaviour, to try to address such matters. That is part of the Government's comprehensive approach....we have heard some horrendous stories this morning about the ways in which people seek to impede and obstruct emergency workers."

Mr McNulty promised that the Government would examine the "wider issues" raised in the parliamentary debate and report back to parliament.

The Union welcomed the news that MPs had given the green light to the legislation. John McGhee, National Officer responsible for health and safety, said: "It is a disgrace that

our members' health and safety is compromised by thugs harming frontline firefighters while they seek to protect lives and property.

"If we can't carry out our job because of violent assaults then it is our communities which are being put at risk.

"This legislation should ensure that those who threaten or attack firefighters are properly punished for their crimes and, as importantly, act as a deterrent to others thinking or planning such attacks.

'Thanks to the FBU and its parliamentary group, this Bill is set to become law. Fire crews will welcome it'

"The Bill is an important step, but more needs to be done. Raising awareness of the issue is one important aspect of this and we welcome the Government's recent commitment to extending the national education programme."

FBU General Secretary Matt Wrack says:

"Thanks to the sustained campaigning of the FBU and its parliamentary group, this Bill is set to become law. Fire crews will welcome the legislation. But it should complement a package of measures to tackle the underlying problem. We hope to see a range of other longer term initiatives designed to protect firefighters and look forward to working with the Government and other fire service stakeholders to make sure they are actioned with the urgency FBU members will be expecting."

→ For more about the Union's campaign against attacks on firefighters visit www.fbu.org.uk/campaigns/attacks



Timeline

April 2005

Labour Research Department publishes first major piece of independent research into the problem of attacks on firefighters in the UK (above). Issue receives nationwide print and broadcast media coverage and politicians start making calls for action over the problem.

June 2005

Labour MP Alan Williams tables his Private Member's Bill for a new law to make it an offence to obstruct or hinder emergency workers such as firefighters. The Union announces its backing for the Bill.

March 2006

Following intense lobbying efforts by the FBU and its parliamentary support group, Alan Williams' Emergency Workers Protection Bill receives cross-party backing as it has its second reading in the House of Commons

July 2006

Emergency Workers Protection Bill has its third and final reading in the House of Commons and passes to the House of Lords.

Autumn 2006

Bill expected to become law.



Alan Williams MP

FLYING COLOURS/GETTY

**Jail for thug
in knife threat
to firefighter**

**into banisters, used
stairs - new weapons
on our firefighters**

JOHN HARRIS/REPORT/DIGITAL.CO.UK



The cross party House of Commons Select Committee, which took evidence from ministers and civil servants as well as fire service specialists, cut away the central planks of the Government's case for regional controls.

A constant theme was that the Government could provide no evidence to back up its claims for regional controls, an issue the FBU had been pointing out for more than three years.

In its report, published on 12 July, the Committee said they were "unconvinced that the Government can offer the assurance of maintained or improved service quality resulting from the FiReControl project and there is clearly widespread doubt across the FRS." The Committee made clear a simple

assurance was not enough. It needed to be backed up with "evidence" which it asked the Government to provide "immediately".

Claims of savings and greater efficiency – central justifications behind the project – were torn to shreds by the Committee. "There is no evidence to suggest any overall saving. As a result we, like many within the FRS, do not have full confidence in the Government's claim that FiReControl will achieve enhanced efficiency."

It also highlighted the high risks linked to the project – denied by civil servants in evidence to the Committee – who claimed the FBU was misrepresenting the facts. Civil Servants and ministers have claimed – wrongly – the risks were only general risks and not to do with this project specifically including the risks of spiralling costs. The Committee concluded: "Although the ODPM claimed that this was a general project risk, the FBU have provided us with an extract from the outline business case showing

risks identified that specifically related to the FiReControl project.

It went on to press the point further: "There are considerable risks associated with the project, identified in our evidence and in the ODPM's own business case. We consider the greatest of these to be the opposition to the project from the FRS itself."

It was this secretive approach which had partly fuelled suspicions and led to the lack of support for the project. The committee concluded: "Indeed the OCG's 'Manager's Checklist', a project management best-practice document, sets out key questions to be considered in developing the business case, including 'do we have internal/external authority and stakeholder support for the project?' and 'have the critical success factors and benefits been agreed with key stakeholders?'. In the case of FiReControl the answer to these questions is no."

REGIONAL CONTROLS

SHOW US THE EVIDENCE NOW

Government plans to create nine regional fire controls in England have been heavily criticised by a House of Commons Select Committee which investigated the plans. Its report outlined severe concerns across the fire service, something Government had always been at pains to deny.

MATTHIAS KULKA/CORBIS

Key points of the Select Committee report

Regionalisation

■ Some, in particular the FBU, are not convinced by statements made by the ODPM. Given the apparent contradiction between recent statements from the ODPM, including those made in oral evidence to us, and the White Paper proposals carried forward through the creation of RMBs and the planned regionalisation of fire control rooms, this is understandable. (Paragraph 13/page 12)

■ The opposition to FiReControl is also based, in part, on a fear of further regionalisation and a view that service delivery would be affected by the regionalisation of fire control centres. (Paragraph 45/page 25)

Funding

■ ...there was some concern that FRAs would have to meet additional, longterm costs arising from new fire prevention and resilience duties and the move to regional control centres (RCCs). There were also some concerns about changes in the way that FRAs are allocating resources in connection with Integrated Risk Management Plans (IRMPs), as increased spending on fire prevention has reduced the money available for other things, most notably, recruitment ... We recommend that the Government fund fully from central resources any additional burdens on FRAs imposed as a result of the modernisation agenda which cannot be met through greater efficiency and other savings. (Paragraph 15/page 12)

Existing resilience

■ ...The fact that the Buncefield incident was well-managed without RCCs suggests that the existing resilience arrangements are potentially effective. (Paragraph 21/page 15)

Loss of local knowledge

■ The President of the FBU highlighted how important local knowledge had been in the organisation of the response to the Buncefield Oil Depot fire, particularly as the initial emergency call did not link the explosion to the oil depot. The Bain Review stressed the importance of local knowledge and Cornwall County Fire Brigade highlighted "the importance of the role Fire Control staff play in assisting, managing and resolving incidents where their local knowledge is a key influence". This has been supported by evidence from other emergency services. The Association of Chief Police Officers, for instance, stressed the benefits of local knowledge: "It is also important to emphasise that, wherever possible, 'local knowledge' must be maintained within any migration to regional call centre systems. Failure to do so is likely to impact on the effectiveness of the Fire and Rescue Service to provide an informed and "intelligence led" response to emergencies".

STEFAN ROUSSEAU/POOL/PA/EMPIOS



Buncefield response suggests existing resilience arrangements 'potentially effective'

'We are unconvinced that the Government can offer the assurance of maintained or improved service quality resulting from FireControl'

The FBU stated that the move to RCCs would be detrimental as local services were core to the operations of a locally accountable fire and rescue service. (Paragraph 24/page 16)

Impact on frontline services.

■ We are unconvinced that the Government can offer the assurance of maintained or improved service quality resulting from the FiReControl project and there is clearly widespread doubt across the FRS. If it can, we recommend it does so, and provides the evidence, immediately. (Paragraph 28/page 18)

Location of RCCs

■ ... The FBU stated: "...The proposed locations have the hallmarks of being chosen for cheapness and ease of gaining planning consent rather than the truly resilient locations they are claimed to be". Other evidence raised similar concerns... We recommend that the Government ensure that the location of each RCC meets strict criteria on resilience. (Paragraph 29/page 18)

'Out of scope' duties

■ We are disappointed that the Government is unable to provide fuller details of duties that

have been defined as out of scope. Removing some operations from control rooms should clearly result in savings in control room costs, but it is not clear where these operations will be transferred to, nor how the costs of the transfer and future operations will be met ... There is no evidence to suggest any overall saving ... we, like many within the FRS, do not have full confidence in the Government's claim that FiReControl will achieve enhanced efficiency. (Paragraph 33/page 20)

Technology

■ A number of witnesses were concerned about the risk of costs for IT projects spiralling out of control ... the Government's outline business case itself identified a risk of total project failure. Although the ODPM claimed that this was a general project risk, the FBU have provided us with an extract from the outline business case showing risks identified that specifically related to the FiReControl project. (Paragraph 36/page 21)

Funding

■ We agree that it is difficult for FRAs to have certainty regarding the financial implications of the move to Regional Control Centres without a full business case which includes information on what costs will be borne by whom over what timescale. (Paragraph 39/page 22)

Absence of full information about FiReControl

■ Much of the opposition to FiReControl within the FRS stems from the absence of clear information. A key criticism is the lack of a fully developed business case. (Para 43/page 24:)

■ The absence of information means that fire authorities and representative bodies cannot give unqualified support as they are unconvinced that the aims of enhanced resilience and efficiency will be achieved. There are considerable risks associated with the project, identified in our evidence and in the ODPM's own business case. We consider the greatest of these to be the opposition to the project from the FRS itself. For FiReControl to have any hope of success, the Government should obtain greater support from the FRS. This can only be achieved through provision of greater information on both the project specifics and long-term plans for the structure of the FRS. (Paragraph 50/page 27)

Firelink

■ We welcome the attempts made by the Government to integrate FiReControl and FireLink, but also note that integration of the two projects will mean that FireLink will be subject to the same risks as FireControl. (Paragraph 53/page 28)

Key points of the Select Committee report

The House of Commons Select Committee, in addition to looking at the regional control rooms proposals, also investigated other fire service issues. Below are some key points:

Prevention and risk assessment?

■ We recommend that the impact and adequacy of Integrated Risk Management Plans is assessed on a nationwide basis. (Paragraph 62)

■ We recommend that the Government provide guidance to the FRS on priorities between local and regional planning and stipulates clearly how IRMPs should reflect those priorities. (Paragraph 63)

■ The Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2006 will come into force in October 2006 ... the Fire Protection Association warned that: “this shift of focus [toward risk-assessment] should not be undertaken at the expense of the traditional fire prevention work that has been so successful in ensuring that the UK workplace has become one of the most fire-safe environments in the world in recent years”.

■ The South East RMB told us: “whilst we welcome the introduction of the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order, and support the drawing together of the myriad of legislation that relates to fire safety in places of work and public buildings, we are concerned that placing responsibility for such matters entirely on the premises occupier or owner, may see a reduction in the high standards now found in places of work and public buildings, with regard to fire safety. (Paragraph 66)

■ We welcome the postponement of the commencement of the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2006 as a sensible precaution to allow thorough preparation. We recommend that the Government monitor the implementation of the Order, and assess its impact on a regular basis. (Paragraph 67)

Sprinklers in schools

■ We strongly recommend that the DfES require sprinkler systems in all new and renovated schools. (Paragraph 69)

The impact of the shift towards prevention

■ The FBU was concerned however that emphasis on prevention might shift attention and resources away from the FRS’s primary role of fighting, and rescuing people from fires... There is no evidence to suggest that the rescue role of the FRS function has been compromised by increased emphasis on prevention and risk assessment. If successful, prevention may lead to further efficiency savings as fewer fires would need to be attended. We recommend that the Government monitor the impact of diverting resources to fire prevention on FRS activity in other areas. (Paragraph 71)

Civil resilience

■ The FBU was concerned that FRAs’ ability to initiate staff cuts as part of the IRMP process created a “central fault line in current national resilience planning”, as personnel levels impacted on the FRS’s overall capacity to respond to a series of protracted major incidents. If IRMPs were well-integrated with wider resilience planning, issues such as overall FRS staffing levels would be more likely to be adequately considered.

■ We recommend that the Government give urgent consideration as to how the Integrated Risk Management Plans may be better linked to planning for major catastrophic incidents. (Paragraph 74)

■ We recommend that the Government conduct a review of civil resilience equipment requirements across England in light of the experience of the July 2005 attacks on London. (Paragraph 77)

Integrated Risk Management Plans

■ However, the FBU have pointed out that Hertfordshire, where Buncefield lies, has an IRMP which prescribes staff cuts in the county with the result that “two of the retained stations who attended in the first 20 minutes of that incident are going to be closed and disappear”. This underlines the importance of local IRMPs being linked to major incident

planning. (Paragraph 78/page 42)

■ We recommend that the Government encourage greater use of mutual aid agreements by FRAs to further enhance resilience. (Paragraph 80)

“We recommend that the impact and adequacy of IRMPs is assessed on a nationwide basis”

Performance measurement and management

■ We recommend that the Government ensure the CPA inspection process covers all the activities of the Fire and Rescue Authorities. (Paragraph 111)

■ We recommend that the Government introduce performance indicators on community fire safety. (Paragraph 113)

Diversity and Retained

■ We recommend that in future, a Fire Authority should not receive a Comprehensive Performance Assessment rating higher than good unless it can demonstrate that significant progress, in line with any revised Government targets, has been made on diversity issues generally and within the workforce in particular. (Paragraph 90)

■ We are disappointed and dismayed at the lack of progress that has been made on diversity within the FRS and particularly at the Government’s half-hearted and ineffective leadership on the issue. We recommend that the Government immediately (i) establish support groups for the Diversity Happens forum; (ii) reappoint a national adviser of equality and diversity for the FRS; and (iii) implement the long-promised new selection tests for fire-fighters. We further recommend that the Government conduct a thorough review of its diversity policy and initiatives relating to the Fire and Rescue Service.

■ We further recommend that the Government conduct a thorough review of its diversity policy and initiatives relating to the Fire and Rescue Service, reporting within the next 18 months. We also recommend that the Government, within two years, publish and promulgate a nationwide strategy for promoting diversity within the Fire and Rescue Service that takes into account the experiences and expertise of all stakeholders. (Paragraph 92)

■ We recommend that the Government provide a clear indication of the reforms it intends to be implemented affecting the Retained Service, including target dates for key benchmarks and completion. (Paragraph 101)

Civil resilience requirements should be reviewed UK wide in light of London bombings



IRMPs under fire

The Select Committee, in addition to looking at the regional control rooms proposals, also investigated other fire service issues.

Recommendations linked to the Union's long held concerns about the local integrated risk management planning process featured prominently. The committee wrote in its report: "The FBU was concerned that FRAs' ability to initiate staff cuts as part of the Integrated Risk Management Planning process created a 'central fault line in current national resilience planning', as personnel levels impacted on the FRS's overall capacity to respond to a series of protracted major

incidents. If IRMPs were well-integrated with wider resilience planning, issues such as overall FRS staffing levels would be more likely to be adequately considered.

We recommend that the Government give urgent consideration as to how the Integrated Risk Management Plans may be better linked to planning for major catastrophic incidents." It called for the "impact and adequacy" of Integrated Risk Management Plans to be "assessed on a nationwide basis" and recommended "that the Government provide guidance to the FRS on priorities between local and regional planning and stipulates

clearly how IRMPs should reflect those priorities". It also responded to the calls from the Union and FBU members for badly needed additional resources for New Dimension, recommending "that the Government conduct a review of civil resilience equipment requirements across England in light of the experience of the July 2005 attacks on London." Furthermore, the report backed the FBU's campaign for sprinkler systems in schools, was highly critical of progress on creating a more diverse workforce and called for an action plan relating to firefighters working the retained duty system.

MARTIN GODDARD/CORBIS



Emergency response: MPs call for Government to monitor whether prevention is undermining it

WHAT DOES A TRADE UNION LAWYER DO?

JESS HURD

Gerard Stilliard is not interested in a six-figure salary from a City law firm. His job is about achieving justice for working people

Lawyers, it must be said, rank in popularity alongside journalists, estate agents and management consultants. Recent research carried out by FBU law firm Thompsons revealed that the public perception of solicitors is that they are over-paid, over-dressed and dishonest about their fees.

Give a dog a bad name. It's unfortunate that no distinction is being made for the trade union lawyers who do their job out of commitment to the people they represent, not to the financial rewards it may reap.

Gerard Stilliard is a solicitor at Thompsons' central London office. He's been with the firm for 8 years and now works mainly on FBU cases, representing members who have been injured at work. He's just returned to the office from two harrowing weeks spent listening to proceedings at the inquest into the deaths of two firefighters in the 2004 Bethnal Green blaze.

The inquest concluded that Billy Faust and Adam Meere died due to basic failures by the Brigade, including failure to provide BA communications and ventilating the building while Billy and Adam were inside fighting fire in the basement.

For Gerard, the details that emerged from the inquest hearing, and its findings,

confirm why he chose a legal career that is very different to that taken by many of his law school colleagues.

"I'm not interested in a six-figure salary working for a City law firm. For me it's about achieving justice for working people and their families, who have been the victim of negligent employers. The failures of the Brigade on the day that Billy and Adam died are shocking. But now that we know without a shadow of a doubt that the Brigade's negligence caused their deaths, we can at least pursue a compen-

Gerard Stilliard outside Thompsons' offices in the TUC's Congress House in London. Behind him is a bronze sculpture by Bernard Meadows representing the spirit of trade unionism

IN BRIEF:

- ◆ Eight years at Thompsons
- ◆ Personal injury specialist
- ◆ Works mainly for FBU
- ◆ Solicitor for Bethnal Green inquest





Thompsons' banner at this year's Tolpuddle martyrs celebrations

sation claim in order to achieve some degree of justice for Billy's loved ones. Money won't bring Billy or Adam back, but, for Billy's family, it will at least help to alleviate some of the hardships caused by the loss of a breadwinner. Perhaps the Brigade will also admit negligence, apologise to the families, and take steps to ensure that a similar tragedy is not repeated."

Gerard would prefer it if he didn't need to be doing his job at all. The day that employers stop injuring and killing innocent employees through negligence is the day that Thompsons, which only ever acts for injury victims and those denied their rights at work, never for employers or insurance companies, should be able to shut up shop.

Corporate manslaughter

But it's unlikely that day will come. While the number of fatal workplace accidents across all industries are marginally down year on year, the number of preventable accidents are still unacceptably high. And in the Fire Service, injury and ill-health rates remain above average.

"As a personal injury solicitor, I sort of represent the end of the line for victims, who have been failed further along. I wish, in a case such as the Bethnal Green tragedies, that I could be doing more than just seeking damages for the families. I'd like to be suing the senior managers responsible for the breaches in health and safety law which caused these deaths. But, after many years of promises from the government, we still don't have tough corporate manslaughter legislation to allow this."

Thankfully, not every day in Gerard Stilliard's working life is tinged with tragedy, though an increasing number of fatal asbestos-related diseases among FBU members means that it is not uncommon.

When he's not dealing with casework, he may be speaking at FBU or other union meetings, conferences and training schools, or attending team meetings and training sessions

within Thompsons. He will also liaise with union officials and lay witnesses to obtain and interpret vital evidence on cases.

And not all cases involve serious injury. Slips, trips and falls are probably the most common accident type to reach Gerard's desk. Some may be worth only a few thousand pounds, some nothing at all. He is convinced from his day to day experience dealing with claims that the talk of a compensation culture in the UK is unfounded.

The compensation culture myth

"If someone has been genuinely injured, through the negligence of another, and it is possible to prove that negligence, then the injured party should be able to claim compensation. But that's not compensation culture, it's just a right that we all have. I get very angry when I hear people saying society no longer seems to recognise a 'genuine accident'.

When Gerard has decided that a claim can be pursued, it's usually a long haul before a claimant receives their damages. There's a great deal of evidence that must be amassed to support the claim, including medical evidence which is sought through relevant expert medical professionals such as orthopaedic specialists and psychologists.

"Much of my job involves organising for these things to happen, using a computerised claims management system developed by Thompsons. There are endless letters to be written and calls to be made, to insurers, doctors, and others, and many deadlines imposed by the legal system to be met. If I don't do these things, I would be negligent and a claimant might not get a penny.

"A day in my life is not about court-room dramas. The majority of claims settle through, often difficult, negotiation with the insurance company long before they reach a court. Having said that, I am forced to start court proceedings more than I should have to, just to force an obviously negligent employer and insurer to speak to me."

Working For You

RICHARD GIBSON

Branch secretary

Kendal fire station



EVERY Saturday until mid-October Kendal firefighters will be collecting signatures in the town centre – getting public support in their campaign to stop local fire chiefs downgrading fire cover at night.

Under Cumbria fire and rescue authority's controversial integrated risk management plan, target response times from the station will be increased from 0-5 to 11-15 minutes between 10pm and 10am. The plan, out to consultation until October 12, cover an area close to the busy M6 motorway and an important tourism centre.

"A property fire's a property fire no matter where you live – fire spreads very quickly and delays can cost lives," says Richard Gibson, who, along with fellow crew members, has been building the campaign and getting the message across to local papers, TV and radio stations. "The public deserve to have the best possible cover."

Wholtime fire crews at Kendal have recently been trained to operate the sort of high volume pumping equipment used at Buncefield and the Carlisle floods as well as swift water rescue equipment when locals or holidaymakers need help. But if the plans go ahead, wholtime shift and crew levels will be cut and retained crews, who have not received specialist training, will be solely responsible for providing overnight cover.

"At the moment, local people get a minimum of two fire engines when we receive an emergency call, so crews can safely tackle the blaze or carry out a rescue. But, under these plans, the second engine will have to come from further afield," says Richard, a temporary crew manager at Kendal Fire station. "This threatens to endanger lives, property and livelihoods. Their plans are half-baked and haven't been properly thought through."

Firecrews are already winning public support for the campaign and the backing of local MP Tim Farron, who, is funding a mailshot to 10,000 local homes.

In mid-October, Richard will be leading an FBU delegation to hand in all those signatures to 10 Downing Street.

A major headache

This complex condition affects almost six million people, a third of them seriously

MIGRAINE

Migraine affects almost six million people in the UK. One third of these people will experience significant disability as a result of their migraines at some or all stages of their lives. It is a complex condition with a wide variety of symptoms. For many people the main feature is a severe, throbbing headache. Other symptoms include disturbed vision, sensitivity to light, sound and smells, feeling sick and vomiting. Having a migraine can be a very frightening experience.

The symptoms will vary from person to person and you might have different symptoms during different attacks. Your attacks may differ in length and frequency. Migraine usually lasts from four to 72 hours and most people are free from symptoms between attacks.

Cause

There is still no known cause for migraine, although most people with it are genetically predisposed to migraine. If you are susceptible to migraine there are certain triggers which commonly start the attack. These include stress, lack of food, alcohol, hormonal changes in women, lack of sleep and the environment. Keeping a record of your migraines can be helpful in diagnosis and identifying your migraine trigger factors. An example of a migraine diary can be found on The Migraine Trust's website at www.migrainetrust.org.

Treating migraine

It may sound obvious, but before you start any form of treatment you need to be sure that you're being treated for the right condition. You need to see your GP to get a confirmed diagnosis. Then appropriate treatment can help prevent attacks from occurring and help you to control the remaining attacks more effectively.

There are two groups of drugs for treating migraine:

SYMPTOMS OF MIGRAINE

- ◆ a painful headache
- ◆ disturbed vision – dark spots, coloured spots, sparkles or 'stars', and zigzag lines
- ◆ numbness or tingling, weakness, and dizziness or vertigo
- ◆ sensitivity to light, sound and smells
- ◆ feeling sick
- ◆ vomiting
- ◆ lethargy

Acute – treatment when the migraine starts

Prophylactic – treatment to prevent migraines

The most common acute treatments for migraine include painkillers, anti-sickness medication, triptans (which relieve pain by narrowing the blood vessels in the head). Prophylactic treatments include beta-blockers, some anti-depressants and calcium channel blockers. There are also a number of alternative treatments used by people

who experience migraine. Unfortunately few have been subject to proper scientific research. Alternative treatments that do have some scientific evidence include acupuncture, feverfew (herbal remedy) riboflavin (vitamin B), and magnesium.

In addition stress reduction therapies such as aromatherapy, reflexology or yoga may be beneficial. Many migraine sufferers find that sleep (or complete rest if sleep is not possible) is the best way of stopping an attack.

Migraine Awareness Week

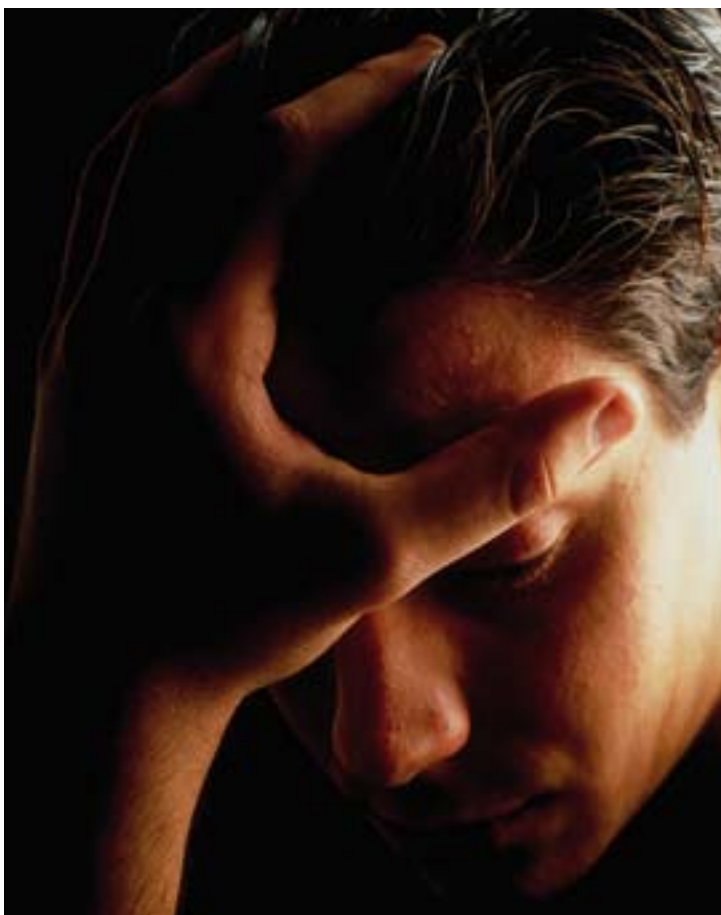
Migraine Awareness Week runs from 3 to 9 September 2006. This year's theme is 'Working with Migraine' and the organisation hopes to raise awareness of the difficulties migraine sufferers can face in the workplace and to highlight what both employers and employees can do to improve the situation.

Further help

→ The Migraine Trust provides information and support to migraine sufferers and their families. It also funds research into the condition with the hope of finding a cure. The Migraine Trust is a charity and relies solely on donations to fund its important work. The Migraine Trust produces more than 30 fact sheets on the condition and has recently launched a detailed pack entitled 'Working with Migraine' that addresses the issues faced by migraine sufferers in the workplace.

→ Copies of the fact sheets and the 'Working with Migraine' pack can be obtained by contacting The Migraine Trust's helpline on 020 7436 1336 or visiting our website, www.migrainetrust.org. You can also call the fundraising team at The Migraine Trust or visit the website to make a donation or become a 'member' of the organisation.

OSCAR BURRIEL/SCIENCE PHOTO LIBRARY



There is no known cause of migraine, but victims may be genetically predisposed

Civil partnership – my rights

Q My partner and I would like to have a Civil Partnership. What are the legal implications?

A Under the Civil Partnership Act 2004 same sex couples can have their relationships legally recognised, giving them the same rights as a married couple.

This affects rights to benefits and tax credits, bereavement benefits and state retirement pension. A civil partner will be treated in the same way as a married partner in all occupational and private pension schemes.

With regards to family law, a civil partner will have the same rights to occupy the civil partnership home as a married person has to occupy the matrimonial home.

They will also have rights as regards tenancy and succession. If a civil partner dies, the surviving partner may be entitled to take over the deceased partner's tenancy.

If the partnership is dissolved, civil partners will be under a duty to provide reasonable maintenance for each other and for any children of the family. The Act also provides for the division of property and for the care and contact with any children.

Civil partners will be allowed to adopt children jointly and one member of a civil partnership may be able to adopt the children of her/his civil partner. Each partner will gain rights in relation to wills and the administration of estates. A surviving civil partner will be able to inherit the estate of her/his deceased civil partner under the intestacy rules.

For further advice and help:

Women and Equality Unit
www.womenandequalityunit.gov.uk

The Village Citizen's Advice Bureau, Manchester
0161 834 2005
www.civilpartnerships.org.uk/



SATOSHI KAMBAYASHI

Legal Beagle

Answers to some frequently asked legal questions that members put to the FBU

Working longer and new legislation

Q I would like to work beyond my normal retirement age but my employer does not allow this. Will the new age discrimination legislation that I've heard about help me to do this?

A The Employment Equality (Age) Regulations come into force on 1 October and create a new right for employees

who are approaching normal retirement age to request that their employer allow them to continue working beyond retirement age.

However, the right is only one of request and the employer is under no obligation to grant the request, or even to provide reasons why it has been refused. The right is also only available to employees, not the broader category of workers. There is a process that must be followed by both the employee in making

this request and by the employer responding to it. This starts from the obligation on the employer to notify the employee of their intended date of retirement and their right to request, in writing, to continue working beyond that date.

If your employer refuses your request, you can appeal. But unless your employer has failed to follow the correct procedures, there is probably little that you can do.

Because the process that must be followed is fairly complex, it is important that you consult your FBU rep before embarking on your request.

Pregnancy and my health and safety

Q I am pregnant. Do I have extra health and safety protection?

A If you are pregnant, have recently given birth or are breastfeeding, your employer must make sure that the kind of work you do and your working conditions will not put your health or your baby's health at risk. To get the full benefit of this protection you must notify your employer in writing that you are pregnant or have recently given birth or are breastfeeding.

Your employer should carry out a risk assessment of your working conditions and if any working conditions are found to be a risk to your health or your baby your employer must remove or reduce that risk. If the risks remain they must temporarily alter your working conditions or hours of work to remove the risk. If this is not possible your employer must offer you a suitable alternative job. If they can't offer you a suitable alternative job, your employer should suspend you on full pay for as long as is necessary to avoid the risks.

→ Write in with your legal problem to legalbeagle@fbu.org.uk and those of widest relevance to FBU members in the workplace will be selected and answered in future editions. With thanks to Thompsons solicitors.

'I've always enjoyed anything to do with theatre'

Simon Thompson loves acting, returning to the Edinburgh Festival this August for the second year running. He's also just made his debut as a director

Newmarket firefighter Simon Thompson may be only 22, but he's something of a veteran when it comes to acting. He starred in his first role – Joseph in *Joseph and his Amazing Technicolour Dream Coat*, at the age of ten. And he hasn't looked back.

This summer, he went to the Edinburgh Festival with the Soham-based Viva Youth Theatre Company, acting in an eighties spoof musical called *Back to the Eighties*.

"I play this really daggy* teacher, who tries to be in with the kids but is in fact desperately uncool. He has a mini breakdown half way through when he finds his girlfriend displayed in a porn mag he's confiscated from one of his pupils. But it is really lighthearted, with lots of songs from the eighties."

Last summer, on their first trip to the Edinburgh, Viva won a prestigious Fringe First, when its production of *Fame* sold out for two nights, playing to houses that were never less than 70 per cent full the rest of the time.

But Simon doesn't only act – he made his debut as a director earlier this summer, putting a cast of nearly seventy 11-16-year-olds through their paces in a stage version of Disney's *Aladdin* at Soham Village College. "I was fairly restricted by the script because Disney own the copyright. But I enjoyed the challenge. It's a fun light-hearted show which is very good for kids, and there's lots of singing and bright costumes."

"I've always enjoyed anything to do with theatre," says Simon, who joined Viva as a schoolboy when it was founded in 1997. "People stereotype acting in different ways

– and a lot of lads drop out because of peer pressure. People like to have a laugh about it – but I just really liked acting and being on stage so I ignored them. I get a bit of ribbing about all that amdram stuff at work – but the lads are really supportive. If I need to get a day off people are always willing to swap. I normally get a lot of the community safety stuff in primary schools: acting skills come in handy because it helps if you know how to project yourself to an audience and get the attention of young kids."

Simon's workmates certainly take an interest in his acting career. "They stitched me up a few months back, telling the local paper I wore the jacket Joseph Fiennes wore in *Elizabeth* when I was working as a film extra near Ely Cathedral. When the reporter first rang, I thought she was joking." But the article duly appeared, with a picture of Simon standing in front of a fire engine outside the station – though there was no sign of Joseph Fiennes' jacket. "It was quite

'It was quite cool being a film extra, seeing what really happened on set, and how much hanging around there is'

PICTURES: ANDREW WARD



SIMON THOMPSON

Newmarket firefighter Simon Thompson has been acting since the age of 10. Now 22, he's with the Soham-based Viva Youth Theatre Company. Last summer, Viva won the Edinburgh Festival's prestigious Fringe First prize after their production *Fame* sold out for two nights.

cool being a film extra, seeing what really happened on set, and how much hanging around there is. It gave me a really good insight into filming; we spent three days getting two minutes worth of film. I'm probably on screen, in a crowd, 30 seconds max. But that's the way with film."

Simon, along with a fellow Viva actor, has recently become involved in the National Youth Participatory Theatre project – aimed at getting more youngsters interested in acting.

Though his heart is really in acting or directing, the youth theatre has provided the opportunity to learn new skills. "Viva is open to 11-25-year-olds in the area and has a policy of not turning anyone away. The older members take on different roles within the company, and some are keen to concentrate on stage management or producing. When you're taking a show on the road it helps to have people who've been around a bit and know what they are doing."

Simon also acts with other local companies – he has performed in pantos and open



Simon Thompson (above, centre) in *Back To The 80s* and (right) with directors Dan Schumann (left) and David Tickner (right)

air productions of *Godspell* and *Carousel* in Ely gardens. He relishes both acting and directing, but has no plans to quit firefighting for a life treading the boards. "I want to settle down with my career, and amateur theatre fits well with the job. At Newmarket, wholetime firefighters work five day rosters, and retained colleagues cover evenings and weekends, which helps when it comes to rehearsals and productions."

As for Simon's acting and directing career, when not rostered for duty, looks set for a long and varied run.

→ More info:

www.amdram.co.uk

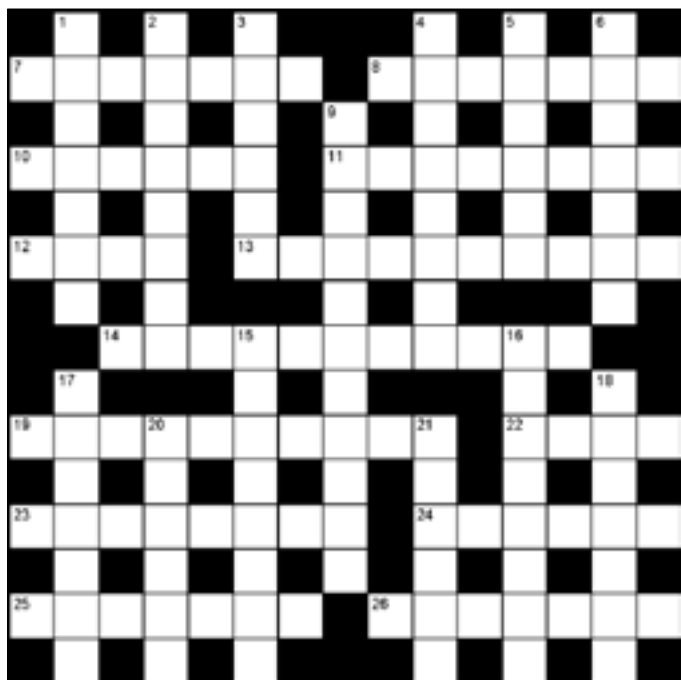
www.noda.co.uk

or try your local paper for ads

* Daggy: unfashionable/unstylish



Quick Crossword

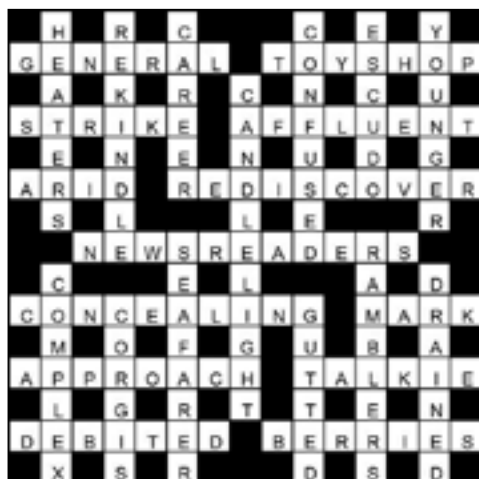


ACROSS

- 7 Region in northwest of Indian subcontinent (7)
- 8 Imaginary band round the middle of the Earth (7)
- 10 To bargain (6)
- 11 First letters (8)
- 12 Sleeveless garment; spit of land (4)
- 13 Union or league joined by treaty (10)
- 14 Heavy machine used in roadbuilding (11)
- 19 Spaces for teaching (10)
- 22 Bigger than puddle, smaller than lake! (4)
- 23 Breakfast dish – in prison? (8)
- 24 See 2
- 25 Loosened; took it easy (7)
- 26 Erased; No longer listed (7)

DOWN

- 1 Holiday home on wheels (7)
- 2, 3, 24 across Capital conflagration of 1666 (3,5,4,2,6)
- 4 Bushy-tailed rodent (8)
- 5 One who enjoys inflicting pain (6)
- 6 Where you would find hammers and screwdrivers (7)
- 9 Containers for material used for kindling; potentially explosive situations (11)
- 15 Shortened (8)
- 16 Costs incurred and reclaimed (8)
- 17 Inundated with water (7)
- 18 Game played with cue (7)
- 20 Loud shrill cry (6)
- 21 Vendor (6)



Solution to
July/August
crossword



Prize Quiz

Win an Epson Stylus Photo Printer R340

Enter our prize quiz and it could be yours.
This month fire in 'quotes and sayings'.
Just fill in the missing word.

1. "From the _____ into the fire"
2. In the First World War soldiers got a
"_____ of fire"
3. "Fire is a good
servant but a bad
_____"
4. "I love the smell of
_____ in the morning"
5. "Play with fire and you'll get _____"



HOW TO ENTER

Send your answers to the prize quiz by 30 September on a postcard to: Prize Competition (September 2006) FBU Head Office, Bradley House, 68 Coombe Road, Kingston upon Thames, KT2 7AE. Include your name, address and membership number. The winner will be selected at random from all correct entries.



Answers to July/
Augusts quiz
1. St George
2. Prometheus
3. Vesta
4. Beowulf
5. Phoenix

Winner of the book
*Firefighters in
art and media* in
our June quiz was
Douglas Downes
of Notts

StationCat

... brings you the news they don't want you to hear

Cat-astrophic



South Yorkshire fire authority just loves saving money to such an extent that some of its aging fleet of vehicles have been grinding to a halt. To lose one vehicle to breakdown is unfortunate, to lose two is exceptional and three is a definite trend.

To lose eight pumps to breakdowns during one incident – the major fire at Fletcher's bakery, Wadsley Bridge – is as near catastrophic as you can get.

Station Cat is told the service is walking such a tightrope because of cuts that some areas were left without anything resembling proper fire cover during the recent heatwave.

South Yorkshire may be running out of pumps and have too few firefighters but my God they are creating a new modern logo to modernise their image. Bosses say the logo will portray: "a modern future-looking organisation and promote our Community Safety Agenda with a clear, coherent Service image". It will also "lift morale".

You just could not make this garbage up. And yes, they really did say all those things.

The new logo will incorporate a Yorkshire Rose with flames. It's to replace the one which includes a Yorkshire Rose and what looks very much like flames.

And the price (before the paintjobs, letterheads etc) for what will no doubt be a masterpiece of originality? £4,000 plus VAT.

It won't cost any more, they say, because the new logo will be gradually brought in when new letterheads are printed and new vehicles arrive. And yes, you have spotted the deliberate error – during the interim it will not have a "coherent service image" it will have two different service images.

No sense



We all know how sensible it is to fit sprinkler systems. And how convenient it is in a new build or during major refurbishments.

And, of course London, the UK's largest fire service – along with the rest of us – fully supports such sensible moves. For everyone else that is, according to London.

Is the new London HQ in Union Street (no doubt they will want to change the street name) in Southwark to be opened next year to be fitted with sprinklers? Alas no. Too expensive they said and knocked the idea back.

Station Cat recalls their expensive and bespoke £26 million training centre suffered a fire not so long ago. Dismissed as a 'minor fire' by a red-faced LFEPa, the 'minor fire' shut the training centre for six months.

Pointless paperwork



While on a prowl of Manchester fire stations I find the same letter has been pinned up in all of them. It is from a highly respected Gorton station officer, Andy Dwan.

In the letter, to Manchester chief Barry Dixon, he describes fire cover as a "disgrace" and says "morale is non-existent".

Mr Dwan goes on: "I feel the fire service is slowly but surely being dismantled bit by bit... There is a dangerous lowering of standards on stations because officers are overwhelmed with audit forms, e-mails, and other administrative tasks, which means they cannot devote the time required for quality training."

"The pride in the service has almost gone. I was proud to call myself a firefighter but I now feel that the operational role is so devalued that there is only the public who appreciate us."

"Management treat us with contempt. I have decided I can no longer stand by and observe this destruction of my fire service".

Mr Dwan resigned after 21 years in the service.

→ If you have any snippets you think Station Cat should get his sharp claws into then e-mail: stationcat@fbu.org.uk



25 year badges



William Dinsdale (left), Leyburn Fire Station, North Yorkshire, receives his 25 year badge from Brigade Chair Ian Watkins



Steve Bayford (right), Potters Bar, Herts, green watch Sub/o and Herts ULF rep, receives his 25 year badge from Tony Smith, Herts Vice Chair



Kevin Kaye (right) Officers National Committee rep Region 6 (East Midlands) receives his 25 year badge from General Secretary Matt Wrack



John Allen (right) Officers National Committee rep Region 4 (Yorks & Humberside) receives his 25 year badge from General Secretary Matt Wrack



Peter Martin (left) receives his 25 year badge from Chris Fitzgerald, Secretary of the London 'East of South' Officers Branch



Steve Calley (right) Boroughbridge fire station, North Yorkshire, receives his 25 year badge from Brigade Chair Ian Watkins



Edward Nicholson (left) Bedale fire station, North Yorkshire, receives his 25 year badge from Brigade Membership Secretary Graeme Willis



Michael Porteous (right) Tadcaster fire station, North Yorkshire, receives his 25 year badge from Brigade Membership Secretary Graeme Willis



Barry Stockford (right) Region 12, Southern, Officers National Committee rep receives his 25 year badge from General Secretary Matt Wrack



Sandy Thompson (left), Northern Ireland Headquarters Branch, receives his 25 year badge from Region 2 Chair Jim Quinn



Pete Ward (right) Harrogate fire station, North Yorkshire, receives his 25 year badge from Brigade Chair Ian Watkins

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→ **Region 12 Buckinghamshire, Berkshire, Hampshire, Oxfordshire, Isle of Wight**
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12rs@fbu.org.uk

→ **Region 13 Cornwall, Somerset, Devon, Avon, Gloucestershire, Wiltshire, Dorset**
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Change of address or next of kin

Advise your Brigade Membership Secretary of any change of address and Head Office of changes to next of kin or nominations for benefits.

FBU FREEPHONE LEGAL ADVICE LINE

0808 100 6061

The line provides advice for **personal injury, family law, wills, conveyancing, personal finance and consumer issues.**

For disciplinary and employment-related queries contact your local FBU representative.



Please send photographic prints or digital picture files to: Firefighter, FBU, 68 Coombe Road, Kingston upon Thames, KT2 7AE or firefighter@fbu.org.uk (Please note that inkjet prints from digital pictures reproduce very poorly). Please include FULL DETAILS for every picture – full names of everyone who is in it; their station/brigade/watch etc; where they are in the picture (eg: left to right); their union posts/branch if relevant; and where and when it was taken.